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## **Making Our Labs the Best Possible Workplace**

*by Bill Richardson*

After allegations of espionage at the Department of Energy's nuclear labs raised serious concerns and allegations of racism from the Asian Pacific American community, I immediately formed a working group - the Task Force Against Racial Profiling - to root out any activities that offered the slightest hint of prejudice.

Starting their work in June, the Task Force - 19 experts from across cultural and ideological spectra, including Yvonne Lee, the U.S. Human Rights Commissioner - has since held exhaustive one-on-one, group, and forum meetings at the Department's three nuclear weapons laboratories, Los Alamos, Sandia, and Lawrence Livermore. On September 14, they submitted their results to me. This is what they found.

The Task Force discovered that media exploitation of a former-employee fired for security transgressions had led to a sense of distrust and suspicion among Asian Pacific American employees at the Department's nuclear weapons laboratories. Some middle managers and lower level supervisors were ambiguous about my vehement opposition to any and all racial profiling anywhere in our agency, leaving some of our Asian Pacific American employees anxious, puzzled over the specifics of the Department's policies.

These findings distressed me. The allegations of espionage at our nuclear weapons laboratories have cast a shadow over an invaluable partnership between the Department of Energy and Asian Pacific Americans, endangering a friendship born of dedication, hard work, and mutual respect.

Americans of Asian descent have made exceptional contributions to our nation's scientific excellence and national security. Nobel Prize-winners like Sam Ting, who co-discovered the tiny "Charm Quark," and Susumu Tonegawa, who shattered barriers in immunology. These men, and hundreds of thousands of men and women like them, have invested their toil in the success of America, allowing untold benefits to us all.

Any suggestion that racism exists in our labs endangers this success, for it can foment a "brain drain" where we lose the best scientists. And "brain drain" could have a domino-effect, hobbling our research quality, hampering our weapons capability, and, ultimately, endangering our national security.

I can't let that happen.

The new findings give us our best tool yet to ensure that racial profiling finds no place in the Department of Energy. Since the Task Force reported to me, I have issued a new directive to our lab directors to more - strongly enforce our no-tolerance policy on prejudice. We are going after specific offenders who violate our policies. We are adding expanded personal sensitivity training. We are increasing the use of focus group meetings, to address the specific concerns of our Asian Pacific American employees. We're developing a proactive recruiting effort for qualified and essential foreign nationals, to help ensure diversity and enduring excellence. And I've asked the Task Force to develop additional recommendations as they continue their work. I expect them to report back to me again next month.

This new order makes clear that the term "foreign nationals" does not include any U.S. citizens, regardless of their heritage, and follows on actions we've taken since these allegations came about. Since the spring, I've met numerous times with leaders in the Asian Pacific American community to hear their concerns. I've met with Asian Pacific American employees at all of the Department's weapons laboratories to hear their problems directly. And I just recently held a meeting of the top Asian Pacific civil rights groups, where I invited them to observe the Task Force's work - an invitation they have considerately accepted. We agree that the Department has a lot more work to do. With their help, we can get it done.

When discussing the recent espionage case in these meetings, I have frequently stated that the alleged actions of any individual should not, do not, and will not reflect on any other American citizen. This is a central creed of the Department of Energy, the Clinton Administration, and the laws of our nation.

I have also addressed concerns that this employee was singled-out for especially stern treatment, making clear that we took action because the employee committed serious breaches of Department security rules. As the federal official responsible for the secrets harbored in our nuclear labs, I can't

abide any such breaches. Now, the FBI is assessing whether legal action should be taken, separate and apart from any actions we may have taken.

On the brink of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln said that the American people do well when America does well by them. Nearly 140 years later, the Clinton Administration abides by this faith in equity, and wants to help ensure that the America we inhabit in the 21st Century is one of inclusion, not exclusion. From the first day in office in 1993, this Administration has fought to empower Asian and Pacific Americans in every aspect of American life: the economy, civil rights laws, health and education, and racial reconciliation. This policy of empowerment continues today.

We, too, are empowered by the Task Force's findings. It makes clear the challenges before us. Now, we can get to work on ensuring that the Department of Energy is the best possible workplace for all our employees.

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